

- March 6, 2023
- **RE: SB0646 School Construction - Public Charter School Facility Fund - Establishment**
- Dear Senator,
- I am Ariel Polk, a parent/ volunteer of Carroll Creek Montessori Public Charter School in Frederick County, Maryland. I am writing to you today to ask you for your support of SB0646 [School Construction - Public Charter School Facility Fund - Establishment](#) sponsored by Senator McCray.
- As a member of the Senate Budget and Tax Committee, this bill will be before you on March 7th. I am writing to share why it is essential that this bill passes.
- FCPS Public Charter Schools are excellent. All three charters attained a 5-star rating on the 2019 Maryland Report Card, in company with only 9 (of 37) other FCPS elementary schools. Yet the future of Frederick County's Public Charter Schools is in jeopardy because of a lack of adequate and affordable facilities. Carroll Creek Montessori, a public charter school in Frederick County that educates 318 students, has been actively searching for an affordable, safe facility solution for more than a decade. There is consistent interest in our school with an extensive waiting list each year. We currently have 1938 applicants with a week remaining for application to our lottery for approximately 35 spots.
- Frederick's public Montessori charter school buildings offer inadequate classroom size, no gymnasium, no kitchen, no cafeteria, and no outdoor green space. In addition, fully 18% of the annual budget for Carroll Creek Montessori and 15% of the annual budget for Monocacy Valley Montessori goes to private landlords instead of to initiatives that directly support student learning, which is where the money would go in a traditional public school. Both Montessori schools have accepted offers on buildings, but we are learning during our due diligence work that budgetary limitations may prevent or limit our ability to renovate either of the buildings. We are still without a quality, long-term solution because of budget constraints.
- LEAs are able to utilize capital funding and general funds from other sources, not available to public charter schools, to support their facilities, operations, & maintenance. SB0646 seeks to establish a fund managed by the IAC that allows public charter schools to apply for up to \$2000 per pupil annually for eligible facilities-related expenses. This funding does not impact the Blueprint formula or take funding away from any other public school students, as the funding would come from the State's General Fund. Instead, SB0646 will allow more Blueprint dollars to be spent IN the classroom on learning instead of ON the school's facility. It also sets strong parameters around spending accountability and transparency while ensuring there is standard bond bill language on repayment if a school should close or sell a privately-owned building.
- We look forward to the hearing on March 7th and your support of SB0646, School Construction - Public Charter School Facility Fund - Establishment. Please know that it is not only myself, but the larger charter school community across the state of more than 24,000 families, 50 schools in seven districts standing behind you.
- Thank you,
Ariel Polk
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